

The Little Cities that Could:

New visions bring new life to Illinois rail towns



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Introduction: Getting Back to Where We Started

In 1850, Congress granted more than 2.5 million acres of land for the construction of a central railroad down the middle of Illinois that became the longest in the country for a time, kicking off a rail boom that birthed dozens of new towns across the state. While early settlements in Illinois had been near rivers, the

railroad opened the rich, fertile prairie of the interior to farming and mining. From open prairies grew stately courthouses and clusters of businesses as the new rows of steel were essential for communities to both send goods to market and receive loved ones. Some settlements actually relocated along the line, and many communities off the railroad faded away. As downstate Illinois led the nation in coal mining and corn production, and later took up manufacturing and education, railroad depots and the downtowns that grew around them became host to the whole of commercial, civic, and social life.

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative



After World War II, the Interstates and other major highways began to take precedence, the town square gave way to the shopping mall and historic downtowns became shadows of their former selves. The shadow grew larger for some communities where declining resources, industrial change, and an increasingly globalized economy threatened or even swallowed entire industries.

But the tide of prosperity has turned once again for some of these towns, thanks to a combination of local initiative and outside investment that is beginning to bear fruit. Even when the importance of the railroad waned, the State of Illinois maintained its commitment to its passenger rail program with consistent funding. In recent years, the state has become a focal point for increased commuter rail service and intercity passenger rail service expansion in the Midwest.

In 1996, nine midwestern states began working together to develop a 3,000-mile, high-speed rail network for the region, with Chicago as the hub, called the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI). In 2009, President Obama announced a new vision for a national network of high-speed rail corridors.

To achieve this vision, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) launched the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Governors from Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, and Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley worked together to apply for funding for the MWRRI. The FRA selected Illinois for a \$1.2 billion federal award in 2010 to bring higher-speed passenger rail service to Amtrak's Lincoln Line between Chicago and St. Louis by 2015-2017.



Railroads played an instrumental role in the development of the nation, and this was perhaps nowhere more true than in Illinois, where a 19th century railroad fever gave way to new towns across the state. While railroads were eclipsed by the highway era in the 20th century, many towns in Illinois are redefining these depot hubs as a means to prosper in the 21st century.

Through the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA), states receive funding and technical support from the FRA to begin other work on the first phases of the MWRRI plan. The State of Illinois has invested more than \$500 million, in some cases with additional federal funds, to help communities build new stations and expand and enhance passenger rail service. That includes two new routes out of Chicago, one to the Quad Cities, and one to Dubuque, Iowa.

Amid this flurry of activity, many communities across the state are looking to their historic downtowns and the rail lines around which they were built as a means to prosper once again. Universities rely on the train to recruit students, and rail service can be a calling card to attract new industry. Promoting new growth in historic downtowns has become a competitive strategy to attract businesses and residents as advanced technology and a growing knowledge economy have increased mobility in the modern era. Providing more and better ways to get around has become a strategy to remain relevant and resilient as communities monitor rising gas prices and global temperatures alongside changing habits toward more active and economical ways to travel.

This report tells the story of how cities in “downstate” Illinois – those beyond Chicago – are re-thinking the role their historic infrastructure can play in their local economies. Whether it is through investing in downtowns, expanding passenger rail, or re-invigorating the role of the train station as a connective community hub, new visions are taking root to make depot towns central once more. We profile six communities in detail, drawing lessons for other communities hoping for similar success.

Ultimately, strong local economies are the foundation of a strong national economy. This report describes how local communities and states can capitalize on our nation’s investment in transportation infrastructure and innovation to grow the prosperity that benefits the country as a whole.

Taking a Risk: Normal Leads the TIGER Pack

Within its 2009 federal economic stimulus package, Congress created an experimental program of competitive grants that became known as TIGER, for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery. It was intended to fund complex, innovative projects that did not fit into existing federal funding silos – which also meant they were likely to be harder to do. It came as a surprise in 2010, then, that Normal's Uptown multimodal station not only was among the first 51 of thousands of applicants to win a grant, but also was the first to break ground on a project. "We were truly shovel-ready," said Wayne Aldrich, director

of development for Normal's Uptown redevelopment.

Getting there, however, took more than a decade. As in many towns across America, Normal's development in recent years had occurred primarily on its perimeter, and for the last decade of the 20th century its central business district struggled. While most buildings were occupied, rents were low, turnover was high, and the area was beginning to lose key businesses.

In 1999, Normal hired Chicago urban designer Doug Farr to create a revitalization plan for the downtown, known locally as Uptown. Farr's plan re-imagined Uptown Normal as a central city plaza anchored by a relocated Amtrak station that would become the hub of several modes and activities. He suggested



The Town of Normal's unprecedented dedication to reinventing its downtown, and the success that followed, gives new meaning to its motto, "Anything but."

rewriting design codes so that surrounding buildings would support a walkable center, with active uses like shops or restaurants on the ground floor. And he asked town leaders to stretch even farther, to require that buildings meet green design standards under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), and to use tax increment financing (TIF) to build public amenities such as a central plaza.



Opening of Uptown Station

Following through on the plan required taking a risk. It required the city to shift gears from a fiscally conservative, pay-as-you go mindset to an investment strategy built on debt financing. “We figured that if we were going to go back into debt, it would have to be for something special,” said Mayor Chris Koos. The city established a quarter-percent sales tax, a four-percent hotel tax, and a TIF district, within which the town would invest a share of rising property tax receipts in streetscapes that paid attention to the needs of pedestrians. The town also used new revenue to build a LEED certified museum, and passed a municipal ordinance requiring new buildings to be LEED-certified.

“Had we known how much resistance we would meet, I’m not sure we would have gone through with it,” said City Manager Mark Peterson. Some community members questioned if the plan would be a wise use of taxpayer dollars, and at least two city council members lost their seats in the process, he said. The town regularly had to go on the defensive to justify new economic development concepts to community members and state agencies alike.

“We were using terms like ‘transit-oriented development’, ‘pedestrianism’, and ‘sustainability’ even before they were national buzzwords,” said Peterson. Even the state’s economic development agency remained skeptical of a strategy that at the time was cutting edge, he said. Town officials found they had to educate groups to bring them on board with their vision. All along, the city remained focused on the linchpin transportation center because it was central to their revitalization concept.

Officials held more than 100 public meetings to secure the support of sister city Bloomington, nearby universities, school districts, business, and labor. “Beyond the need to educate people about our vision, it was important to have everyone on board so that politicians could feel safe about getting behind the project,” said Peterson. Normal hired a lobbyist and for five years city leaders knocked on congressional doors, eventually winning earmarks of \$10 million – but not enough to build the station. Years of outreach and door knocking took its toll on a lean and overworked staff at the city. “There were times where we were sick of even hearing the word multimodal,” Peterson recalled.

Then the recession hit. The 2009 stimulus initially looked like a bust for Normal. “The state put that first round of stimulus money into hot-mix asphalt,” said Peterson. “That’s spending that doesn’t create jobs, isn’t sustainable, benefits maybe 300 contractors, and will last maybe ten years.” So when the town applied for the first round of TIGER grants in 2009, many remained skeptical that their community could compete successfully in a national program.

Their work, however, paid off. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) selected Normal’s project as one of 51 chosen from among 1,500 applications. All told, the \$49.5 million project received \$22 million from TIGER, \$10.6 million in additional federal funding and more than \$13 million in state and local contributions.

Since opening in July 2012, Uptown Station and its circular plaza have become the new heart of the town. City Hall relocated to the upper floors of the station building, a children’s museum began drawing families and school visits from miles around, a major hotel and other businesses opened. Since 2004, Normal’s central area has lured \$220 million in private investment, and there are additional plans in the works for additional mixed-use office buildings and condos.

Meanwhile, the local bus service has since relocated its hub to Uptown Station. Despite challenges with timely service due to the region’s spread out subdivisions, ridership is up year over year. Inter-city bus service leaves from the station to Peoria, the Chicago airport, Denver and other destinations.

The Town plans to expand its multimodal infrastructure and is implementing a regional bicycle transportation plan, though funding it will take time. “We can’t afford not to think about this,” said Normal Mayor Chris Koos. “We have to get more bang for our buck, and single-occupancy vehicles is not that. We have to find ways to carry more people on our transportation corridors.” But it is also about providing for residents, he added. “How many families are choosing to go down to one car? For a two-car family with a 30-year mortgage, getting rid of one car is the equivalent of adding a quarter million dollars of buying power over the life of the mortgage,” Mayor Koos said.

Normal has since seen representatives from many other communities come calling to learn the town’s key to success. “There are a lot of places that want this. The only reason you don’t see more places doing it is because it requires so much risk and investment,” said Peterson. For the region’s leaders, the pay-off was worth the risk: new economic development has boosted the local economy and created jobs, and providing infrastructure for multiple modes of transportation puts the region on sound footing for the long term.

“We can’t afford not to think about this. We have to get more bang for our buck, and single-occupancy vehicles is not that. We have to find ways to carry more people on our transportation corridors.”

— Chris Koos, Mayor of Normal

Lessons From Normal

The right investments attract more investment. Normal learned how creating a place where people would want to walk around and stay also attracted new development, and that setting a high bar with design requirements can in turn attract high-quality investment.

Risk is required. Going into debt to finance redevelopment was a difficult decision for Normal, but the Town began with a balanced budget. Many municipalities across the country are struggling just to keep up with existing debt obligations. Investments like Normal's require substantial capital and financial risk. Some communities cannot afford that kind of investment – either because of a declining tax base or existing debt burden. But communities that can afford (and stomach) the risk stand to gain from taking the plunge, and state planning grants coupled with federal grants like TIGER can make the difference.

Achieving a vision requires stretching the bounds of “normal.” Town officials frequently stood their ground on new concepts that were unfamiliar to economic development groups, state agencies, and political staff. But their strategy worked and now similar towns from across the country call on Normal to learn from their success. The extent to which they can emulate that success may depend on whether federal or state competitive grant programs are available to kick-start their revitalization plans.

Transportation options support community well being. Municipal leaders in Normal view investing in transportation options as an investment in the region's future. The new train station has the fastest growing ridership in the country, and the Town wants to meet shifting demographics as more families demand a more diverse array of transportation choices. Leaders are hopeful that transit ridership will continue to rise, and that they can secure funding for a new regional bike plan to allow residents who want to get out of their cars to do so safely.



In the Quad Cities, a desire to remain competitive after widespread industrial job loss catalyzed a series of development initiatives in Moline and a regional movement to restore passenger rail service to the region. Subsequent growth has given the entire region cause to celebrate.

Better Together: The Quad Cities Restore Passenger Rail

When the federal government in 2010 allocated the final chunk of funding needed to restore passenger rail service from Chicago to the Quad Cities – five cities straddling the Illinois-Iowa boundary on the Mississippi– leaders on both sides of the river breathed a sigh of relief. The benefits of the rail service were not only clear, but also a long time coming.

Deindustrialization struck hard for the urban cluster that includes Moline, East Moline, Rock Island, Davenport, and Bettendorf (the last of which joined

after the “Quad Cities” name had already stuck). The region’s industrial base, concentrated in farm equipment, began to lose jobs in the 1970’s, and the agricultural crisis of the 1980’s hit like a bomb. “The community was so focused on agriculture that when that industry sector crashed, we realized that we had no other options,” said Ray Forsythe, director of planning and development for the City of Moline. “We had to diversify.”

In Moline, a community on the Illinois side and home to the John Deere Corporation, redeveloping the industrial riverfront became a focal point for preparing for a more diverse economy. The agricultural depression had not only cost the region jobs, but also caused the loss of merchants, residents, and

pedestrian traffic in the downtown, while leaving behind under-used land and deteriorating buildings that further brought down property values. In 1989, a group of dedicated civic and business leaders formed a coalition to strategize about how to create jobs, expand Moline's tax base, and return vibrancy to Moline's downtown. Their effort became Renew Moline, Inc.

in the Moline Centre Plan. Created in 1991 and updated in 2001, the plan re-imagined the downtown as a dense and pedestrian-oriented hub of employers and amenities that can easily be accessed by a variety of transportation options. The city worked with MetroLINK, the regional mass transit district, to develop an intermodal transportation hub for

fixed-route service, as well as intercity bus service and water taxis, and planned its preferred location for a future passenger rail station.

Through concerted efforts between Renew Moline, the City, and the direct investment of major corporations, dozens of projects helped transform the downtown from an industrial riverfront to a destination. A civic center draws concertgoers, Western Illinois University is building a new campus nearby, and two new hotels opened. The City refashioned streetscapes to

open up the riverfront to pedestrian use, while John Deere built a museum to commemorate the region's industrial origins.

Moline works closely with MetroLINK to ensure that new buildings have transit access, and in the last few years, the region has seen an uptick in riders who choose to leave their cars at home and take transit instead.

"We've been successful in diversifying because development has been such a big focus and dense development connected to transit falls into that," said Forsythe. "We have facilities to support a variety of



The John Deere Commons

"Thirty-five years ago the community sentiment was that the last one out should turn out the lights," said Janet Matheson, the current executive director for Renew Moline. As the first of many steps to revitalize the downtown, John Deere donated land it owned along the waterfront for the city to redevelop. "It wasn't benevolence," said Mathis. "They needed to attract new young people to the area. If it wasn't a cool place to live, they wouldn't have the buy-in or intake necessary for a strong workforce."

Renew Moline worked closely with the city to develop and help implement its vision for the future, captured

uses and options for how to get to them,” he added. Since 1989, nearly \$300 million has been invested in the downtown in both private investment and public funding, including federal Transportation Enhancement funds, State of Illinois Capital Funds, federal Community Development Block Grants, federal earmark funding, and City TIF investment.

Moline’s success is only one piece of the greater Quad Cities regional redevelopment. In Davenport, Iowa, civic leaders facilitated a downtown revitalization project similar to Moline’s efforts that now boasts an agricultural technology campus and art museum. East Moline, Bettendorf, and Rock Island have also taken strides to attract new businesses and residents. Leaders from across the region take an interdependent approach to what they view as a shared history and future, said Forsythe. “We have economic development partnerships and work together, and we truly think of ourselves as one Quad Cities,” he said. Almost two decades after Moline included a new

passenger rail station in its visionary 1991 plan for its city center, regional leaders began to seriously consider how to bring passenger rail back. The Quad Cities had been served by a privately operated passenger rail system between Rock Island and Chicago since the mid 1800’s, until it declared bankruptcy in 1978, and only freight connections remained.

“We didn’t do this from a train lover’s perspective, we know that these connections are important to companies.”

— Paul Rumler, Executive Vice President for the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce

But as the region began to attract new businesses and residents, civic and private leaders believed that passenger service could further help put the Quad Cities on the map. “In the 1980’s and 90’s, the Quad Cities proved to be a destination, and we saw the case for a train,” said Paul Rumler, executive vice president for the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce. “We saw the economic development potential, a way to connect to Chicago and tie into the global economy.”

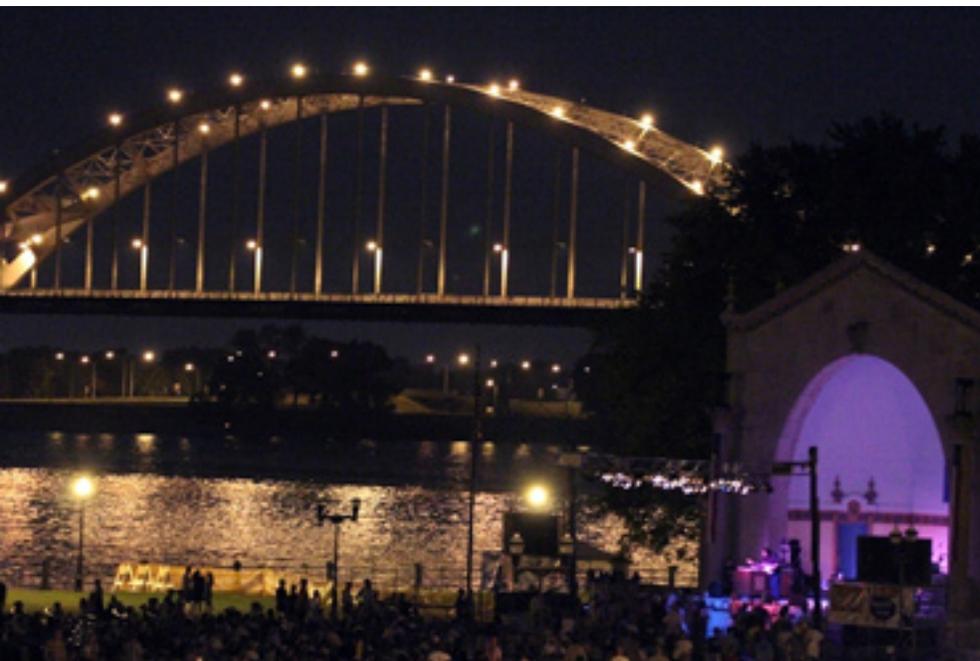
In 2007, the Chamber put its money where its mouth was and committed financial resources that would make the restoration of passenger rail service a top priority. They helped form the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition to advocate for funding and build the regional support necessary to convince the federal government, as well as Illinois and Iowa, to bring passenger rail service to the region with the Quad Cities as a stop

Rendering of proposed Moline Multimodal Station



between Chicago and Iowa City. “We didn’t do this from a train lover’s perspective, we know that these connections are important to companies,” said Rumler. “Air and roads are fine, but the train lets you be more productive,” he added.

The I-74 bridge that joins Bettendorf, Iowa and Moline, Illinois is a critical connection for the Quad Cities region.



The coalition expanded to more than 150 organizations from business, labor, and government and over 10,000 total members advocating to secure funding and build political support for new passenger rail service between Chicago and Iowa City. The coalition built support with state and federal legislators, earning funds to study the feasibility of service and some earmarks from the federal government and the state of Illinois, but not enough to restore service.

Then, Iowa’s political landscape changed. While the Iowa DOT had made an active effort to study and promote the feasibility of passenger rail service in cooperation with its state government, in 2010 the

state legislature withdrew its commitment to fund a yearly state match for service. Without Iowa’s support, the future of the line came into question.

However, the coalition still saw value in a rail connection to Chicago, and did not give up. They made the case that a line between Chicago and the Quad Cities would support creation of 8,000 jobs. Business and civic supporters argued the line would earn the region greater success recruiting talent, accessing capital, and connecting to global markets. After years of securing smaller pots of funding and building political support at all levels of government, the coalition’s arguments proved successful, and in late 2010, the federal government allocated the final portion needed to build a line from Chicago to the Quad Cities. Service is expected to begin in 2015.

While the future of Iowa’s portion of the line remains uncertain, regional leaders across the Quad Cities have found cause to celebrate. Since the announcement, the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce has marketed the line with the same emphasis as it has other assets, such as the region’s productive workforce. “Site selectors always want to know where we are in relation to Chicago, and passenger rail service comes up in those meetings,” said Rumler. While rail alone is not necessarily the deciding factor for companies, it’s always a part of the decision.

“The certainty of service is important,” said Rumler.

“We had developments announced in the subsequent months after the rail announcement on a scale that we’d never really seen before.” Since the project was announced, the region has seen nearly a billion dollars in private investment, he said.

In tandem with the final funding allocated to restore passenger rail to the region, the City of Moline won a TIGER II grant from the federal government to transform a brownfield warehouse building into a LEED-certified station that will host the new passenger rail service. The project builds upon and will further catalyze Moline’s redevelopment efforts, while serving as a model for future green renovations in the downtown commercial district.

For a region that views its future as interdependent, the investment boost for Moline has earned the support of the region writ large. The station will connect passenger rail service with existing inter- and intra-regional bus service, bicycle facilities, personal vehicles, taxis, water taxis, and shuttles to the nearby Quad Cities airport. “These connections will help bring the Quad Cities even closer together,” said Mathis.

Lessons from the Quad Cities

Support from a broad range of sectors is key when seeking funds. The Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition was instrumental in building the support required to secure funding to restore passenger rail. It is important to have buy-in from the entire community so that elected officials can feel safe in supporting a project.

Capitalize on the private interest in developing public assets. The John Deere Corporation took a concerted interest in redeveloping downtown Moline to attract a strong workforce, and passenger rail has attracted new companies even before the line has been built. Partnerships between large employers and municipalities can strengthen efforts for regional restoration.

Market demand for walkable neighborhoods with transit service is growing. While the region is surrounded by farmland, Moline was proactive in promoting multi-story development in its downtown, and the transit district works with developers from across the region to incorporate transit into new projects. Regions can start early to incorporate transit into projects.

Transportation options are a boon to business recruitment and retention. Business leaders in the Quad Cities value a train connection that will allow them to get work done while traveling. The regional transit district has seen an increase in ridership from residents who also have the option to drive. The new I-74 bridge – the flagship transportation project for the region – will include a bike lane and serve as a connection for automobiles and pedestrians alike. As a next step, the regional transit district hopes to implement a plan for high-frequency bus service throughout the region.

Learning and Leading: How Champaign-Urbana Went Multimodal

Champaign-Urbana is best known as home to the University of Illinois. Three quarters of the region's 130,000 residents have some affiliation with the University, and its campus has long served as a core to the region much like Chicago's Loop does for that city. The university's research park supports the creation of, and works closely with, many technology-focused start-ups. It is a top priority of regional leaders to recruit and retain the talent necessary to spur innovation and support high-wage jobs. In order to support these goals, regional leaders created a marketing and development approach they describe as "micro-urban".

Their concept is to keep the region affordable and easy to get around in while offering the diversity, culture, technology base, and vibrant public discourse of a larger metropolitan center. Surrounded by inexpensive, fertile farmland, the region developed like most auto-oriented, mid-sized suburbs, so the decision to develop a more-dense core was a big step. But in the last decade, it has become a priority.

In 1998, a swath of land previously occupied by a fish market opened as Illinois Terminal in downtown Champaign. "I had just moved here, and was like, what the heck is that?" said local planning consultant Cynthia Hoyle. By then, the once-vibrant area had become a 9 to 5 operation that residents described as sleepy, dangerous, or a "no man's land", so the shiny new station connecting passenger rail and local buses, topped by office space, stood out. Champaign's city council took a gamble in allowing the transit district to build it at a time when some people expressed

Since the late 1990s, Champaign-Urbana has made a conscious choice to attract downtown development and make the region a place where people can get to their daily needs without a lot of driving. The result so far: expanded transit with increases in ridership, more housing accessible by more than one mode of transportation, more people biking and walking, and new economic development.



skepticism that passenger rail would be successful in their region, and the future seemed to belong to the new, low-density development on the outside of town.

“Some people in the community saw it as a big white elephant at the time, but they were hoping it would spur more development,” said Hoyle. It worked, and 15 years later, the facility has been credited with sparking a downtown renaissance that has seen the development of numerous bars, restaurants, and offices in the adjacent area. “It’s a completely different place,” said Anthony Santorelli, director of program development at the Illinois Green Business Association, one of the tenants in a five-story building recently built across from the terminal that houses offices and restaurants.

Use of the station, which also hosts the local and rural bus service as well as privately run inter-city bus services, has also exceeded expectations. Amtrak ridership on the once-daily trains between Chicago and Carbondale and once-daily trains between Chicago and New Orleans has increased year over year for the past five years. Both the local and rural mass transit districts have seen dramatic increases in ridership. University students make up a significant share of ridership, and the facility has seen a larger uptick in use as an increasing number of students choose not to own cars and the University recruits additional talent from abroad who have come to expect reliable public transportation based on experience with it in their home countries. The facility also attracts riders from across the community, including service workers and university staff, and the train in particular is highly popular with business travelers to Chicago.

“We’re at maximum capacity in every sense of the word,” said Karl Gnatd, director of market development for the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (CUMTD), who is conducting a feasibility study for added bus bays and expansion of the building

footprint to accommodate growing ridership. Added capacity to accommodate more riders at the terminal will complement regional initiatives to make the area more multimodal. In 2006, a committee of representatives from the region’s cities and villages, several nonprofits, and CUMTD found through a study of regional transportation trends that although the majority of the region’s commuters drive personal vehicles, many of them are financially strained by the need to do so. Many workers in the region earn less than \$30,000 a year and cannot afford the costs of the vehicles that often become their main form of transportation.

The group developed and implemented a regional Mobility Implementation Plan, or MiPlan. CUMTD expanded service while reducing fares, the university redesigned its campus to be more pedestrian-friendly, and the cities have also allocated funds to make their roadways safer for people on foot or bicycle. Now, nearly 90 percent of the region’s residents live within a quarter-mile of a weekday bus route and the average commute by any mode of transportation is under 15 minutes.

Transit ridership has increased every year (it rose 15 percent in the last two years alone) and there are more people biking and walking, including hundreds of children traveling to school each day through a widespread regional effort to promote safe routes to schools.

Shortly after the MiPlan group found that many commuters could not afford their transportation costs, the City of Champaign faced some financial challenges of its own. During the recession, a steady stream of new revenue from developing annexed land dried up, and Champaign found itself millions of dollars in debt from the sewer, road, fire, police, and plowing services that it committed to support those developments. A fiscal impact study prepared for the City by

TischlerBise showed that only downtown development and the highest priced single-family residential housing generated sufficient tax revenue to cover added services and infrastructure.

“As long as new houses were being built and tax revenues were increasing, the City could cover operating costs. But when the housing bubble hit, new construction stopped, sales tax revenue went down, and suddenly they couldn’t pay,” added Hoyle. While suburban expansion has continued at a slower pace, the cities have attempted to be more selective about projects where possible.

“I’m not saying the first ring around Champaign was bad, or even the second, but like with any other investment, the early money may not be wrong, but by the time everyone else jumps in you have to say, ‘Hey this is a 50-year-old idea, it might not be working.’”

— Jon “Cody” Sokolski, CEO of One Main Development

“Now City Council is asking suburban developers how they’re supposed to pay for new infrastructure,” said Jon Sokolski, a developer of several mixed-use buildings in the region. Sokolski is among a new and growing class of developers focused on infill development. Although it requires jumping through additional hoops versus developing on the outskirts – buying smaller plots of land at higher prices, working with the city to change zoning, and even spending twice as much on materials to match historic architecture – it is a better way to invest, Sokolski said.

“It’s about putting quality back and creating community. I’m not saying the first ring around Champaign was bad, or even the second, but like with any other investment, the early money may not be wrong, but by the time everyone else jumps in you

have to say, ‘Hey this is a 50-year-old idea, it might not be working,’” he said.

At the same time, the region found that the investments made in its core were panning out, and paying dividends. In addition to the success of the Illinois Terminal, which has long since paid for itself through additional development and its leased-out office space, a 2002 investment by the City of Champaign into a “complete street” reconstruction for a corridor adjacent to the university campus brought significant reinvestment of commercial and residential buildings, with 13 major projects completed to date. Four projects currently slated to break ground are

alone valued in excess of \$100 million.

“These developments support the region’s long-term goals,” said Rita Morocoima Black, planning director for the Champaign County Regional Planning

Commission (CCRPC). Spreading out versus growing within existing developed areas would create additional traffic, add to local tax liabilities, and require more than 25,000 acres of fertile farm land to be lost to residential use, she said, none of which align with where the region wants to go.¹

To get there, local officials have a plan to focus development on three corridors between the university and the two cities’ downtowns.

Some infill and redevelopment projects are already underway, but challenges remain. In 2009, the transit

¹ According to an analysis by Smart Growth America, efforts within the region to focus development closer together, incorporate transit into development plans, and foster better connections between streets and neighborhoods could reduce residents’ tax burden by \$52 million over 20 years.

district introduced high-capacity bus service along the corridors, which added over 23,000 additional revenue hours of transit service in its first year. “It has been wildly successful, but now our roads are shot,” said Bill Volk, Director of CUMTD. The district submitted a \$29 Million TIGER grant application to repair and upgrade the roadways while adding or improving sidewalks, bike lanes, transit amenities, and traffic signals. While the project had widespread regional support, it has not yet won TIGER grant funding. The cities have begun to repair the roads bit-by-bit, but regional leaders still hope to secure the remaining investment because it is so central to their development strategy. “It will literally pave the way for more people to get around, whether by car, bus, bicycle, or on foot,” said Hoyle.

While the region’s planners try to keep up existing roads, the business community has another ambitious agenda. “We’re part of a public-private group advocating for increased rail service,” said Laura Weis, executive director of the Champaign Urbana Chamber of Commerce. “Many of our businesses do a fair amount in Chicago. We want our members to get there in an efficient and productive way,” she said. The group has joined several universities and other Chambers of Commerce to lobby for additional passenger rail service daily on the Amtrak line between Chicago and Carbondale. The Chamber and many other regional leaders also have thrown their weight behind a future high-speed rail connection to Chicago.

A decade can do a lot.

Ten years ago, Champaign City Council members doubted that passenger rail would survive over the long haul, and now regional leaders are advocating for additional round trip service. Efforts to make the

region more multimodal have become central to the region’s economic future, by lowering infrastructure liabilities, aligning with local market preferences, and fostering their micro-urban vision for long-term growth. While Champaign-Urbana has some unique features as a college town, the benefits the region has experienced offer lessons for anyone interested in promoting a community where residents can comfortably walk, bike, bus, take a train, or drive, as needs and desires dictate.

Cyclists in Champaign





The One Main Building at night

Lessons from Champaign-Urbana

Spread-out development has outsized fiscal costs. Champaign learned that the municipal costs associated with low-density housing put it in a losing position, because homes on the suburban fringe need more in infrastructure and services than their taxes bring in. For individual residents, houses on the suburban fringe may not be as affordable as they seem when accounting for transportation costs. Illinois is the first state to pass legislation that economic development programs factor the combined cost of housing and transportation, an example that other states could follow. [For more on calculating the combined cost of housing and transportation, see the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Index at htaindex.cnt.org.]

Regional character takes planning. Champaign-Urbana's plan to become micro-urban is a central strategy for its economic future. Investments that support infill development may not only reduce long-term costs, but support more vibrant and engaged communities. More information about this plan is available at www.micro-urbanist.com.

Complete streets support high-quality growth. Amenities such as enhanced sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit infrastructure help move more people within existing corridors, and at a lower long-term cost. These facilities also support healthier lifestyles by making it easier for people to walk and bike to their destinations.

Transportation options can help attract a "global" workforce. Champaign-Urbana has found that providing additional amenities is one key strategy to attract a knowledge workforce for a globalized economy that is seeing a growing international population of students who do not drive. High-capacity transit and facilities to make biking and walking safer and easier stand to help attract new residents and spur new development, while reducing congestion and preserving farmland.

Taking Advantage: Alton Redefines its Suburbs

Alton is a small community 25 miles northeast of St. Louis, MO just across the Mississippi. Like many communities east of St. Louis, Alton was founded on heavy industry. While manufacturing remains a mainstay in Alton today, automation took its toll. “You needed a lot more people for a job in the 1970’s than you do now,” said Monica Bristow, executive director of the RiverBend Growth Association. The region has lost over one-third of its population since then and is classified as an economically distressed area.

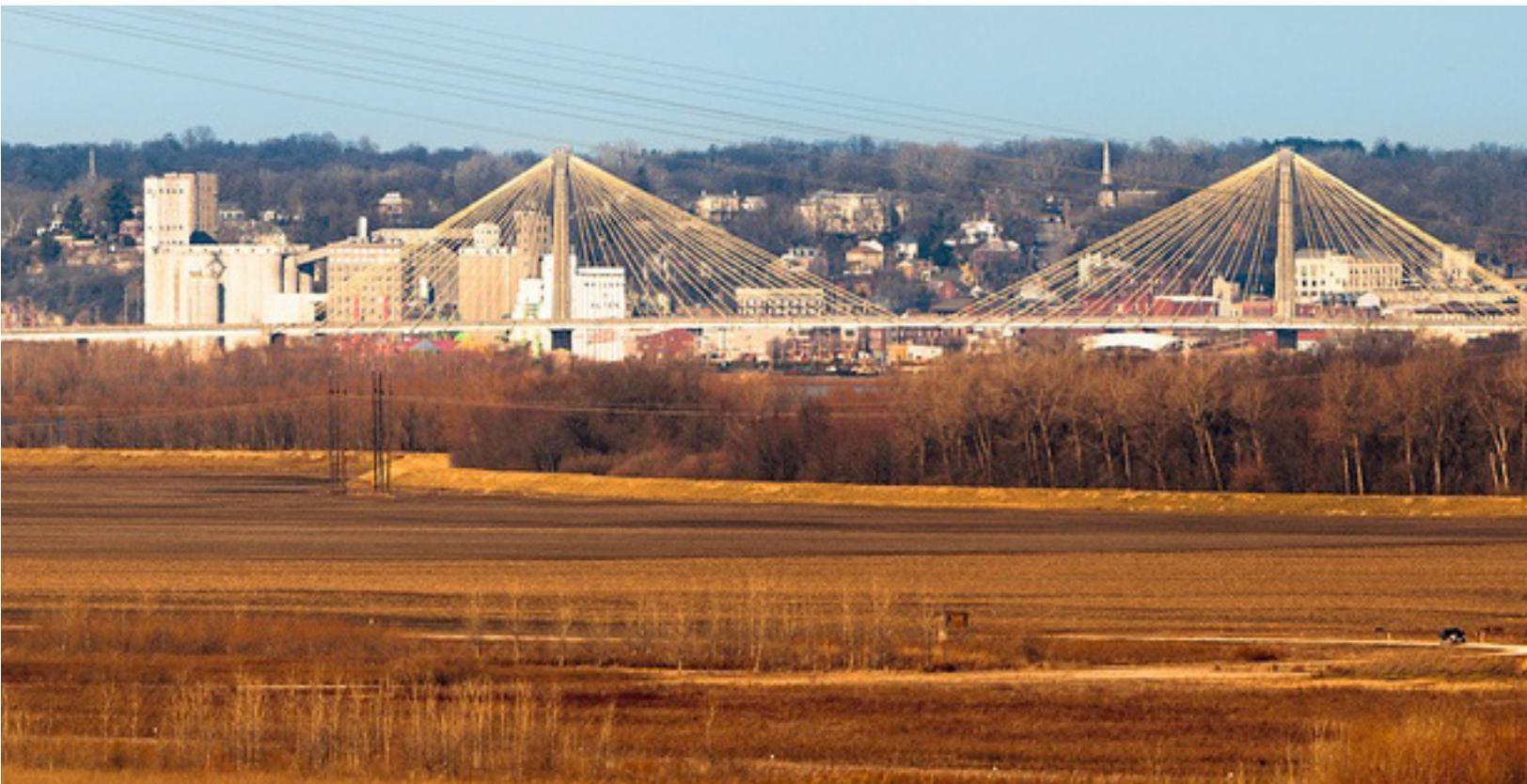
But ask locals about their community and they are much more likely to talk about the local bald eagle nesting ground, the ongoing restoration of the historic downtown, or the famous people who were born there (including Miles Davis and Robert Wadlow, the world’s tallest man). For over a decade, the city has made an effort to preserve and capitalize on its historic assets

Faced with the opportunity to promote economic development on a corridor dominated by sprawl, the City of Alton decided to pursue a different approach.

and scenic beauty as one way to rebound, and has had success as a destination for Asian and European tourists to the Mississippi region.

When the Illinois DOT announced that higher-speed rail upgrades would bring 110-mph service and more trains per day to Alton, the last stop before St. Louis on the line from Chicago, the community saw an opportunity to bring more people to their city. The current station, abutting a residential neighborhood along a parkway outside of town, had been outgrown as ridership on the line increased. “It barely serves its purpose,” said Phil Roggio, Alton’s primary consultant on the project, “and it does nothing more beyond that.”

The Illinois DOT worked with the City to determine where a new station might go. “They put it along a boulevard with big box stores and chain restaurants from end to end,” said Sara McGibany, executive director of Alton Main Street. Business owners in the downtown wanted to see the old station revived as a centerpiece of the ongoing restoration of the city’s historic core, but the options that the Illinois DOT



offered were all outside of the downtown. “We had to put a station where the tracks already were,” said Roggio.

The chosen site – a little-used golf course abutting a busy parkway – offered a less than picturesque setting. However, the City and the Madison County Transit District jointly developed a vision to recast the 58-acre parcel of land surrounded by strip malls into a new, multimodal community. The new station would serve as a hub for rail and high-frequency bus service, surrounded by 28 acres of walkable, mixed-use development. And it would be eco-friendly in both form and function.

“We wanted to make sure that the development occurred in the greenest way possible with minimal impact on the environment,” said Alton’s

former mayor, Tom Hoechst. The City partnered with the local chapter of the Sierra Club and the HeartLands Conservancy to develop a sustainable strategies master plan that would include restoration of a stream corridor, state-of-the-art stormwater management, and bike/pedestrian facilities including off-street trail segments, on-street bike lanes, connections to a 15-mile trail network, and sidewalks and safe crossings in an area without sidewalks. The station also would serve as an eco-tourism gateway, offering visitors information on the region’s natural attractions as well as shuttles and bike rentals so that the destinations will be within reach without needing a car.

The City of Alton pursued and received a \$13.85 million TIGER grant to make its vision a reality. The grant will augment a \$73 million financing package for what is now known as the Robert Wadlow Town Centre project. “One of the city’s goals for the project

is to bring jobs and housing closer together and provide transportation choices so that people don’t have to use a car for everything,” said S.J. Morrisson, director of marketing for the Madison County Transit District. The district has seen steady increases in ridership, jumping from 2 to 2.5 million between 2011 and 2013. The new multimodal station will connect visitors with high frequency, high-speed bus service to downtown St. Louis and to that city’s Metrolink light rail, as well as destinations throughout the region, including downtown Alton, Wood River, Godfrey, East Alton, and Edwardsville, home to the Edwardsville campus of Southern Illinois University.

“We wanted to make sure that the development occurred in the greenest way possible with minimal impact on the environment.”

– Tom Hoechst, former mayor of Alton

While the City has received numerous bids for development and has leveraged over \$40 million in private investment so far, it is taking the time to ensure that its development furthers the City’s vision, said Bristow. The City hopes to include a mix of green industries, residential units, restaurants and cafes on the site. “People are excited to have this adding to the local economy,” said Bristow. “It’s exciting not only for the livability and ability for people to get around, but also the development and growth that we know is going to happen right here. We in the economic development business know that a train station is a good thing, but when those buildings come up around the station, that will spell out growth for Joe Six Pack, too.”



Rendering of the proposed Alton Multimodal Station

Lessons from Alton

Natural areas are economic assets. Alton has learned that its natural features are not only a local treasure, but an economic asset. Preserving natural areas can help keep regions scenic and ensure that valuable land remains viable for food production.

“Greenfield” development can be green. Alton worked closely with environmental groups to ensure that the project would not only have minimal environmental impact, but would provide active alternatives to driving. Partnering with environmental and other constituencies can foster better projects while securing stronger buy-in from the community. When done carefully and in cooperation with regional transit districts, new, greenfield development can be walkable and have convenient access to multiple modes of transportation.

Transportation options support new economic opportunities. Alton adopted a multimodal approach for its station both to meet the needs of current commuters and for a competitive edge in a growing eco-tourism industry that values going car-lite. More information about Alton’s plan is available at <http://www.alton-il.com/content.cfm?page=TIGER>.



Downtown Alton



The City of Lincoln is a small depot town with ambitions to build on its historic form to strengthen a walkable core where people will want to visit, or come to live.

Valuing History: Lincoln Looks to its Past to Renew its Future

Named after and by the 16th President of the United States, The City of Lincoln, IL was founded as a depot town between Chicago and Springfield. Its quaint square and historic buildings remain largely intact, offering residents and visitors the small-town Americana of a bygone era. “The downtown square set-up really lends itself to small-town living,” said Bill Hogland, executive director for Main Street Lincoln. Now, the town hopes that building on its historic form will attract new residents and opportunities.

The region has experienced its share of struggles. In

2002, the state closed the county’s largest employer, a center for developmentally disabled individuals, costing the region 600 jobs. The Great Recession of 2008-2012 compounded the economic troubles. “Our base of businesses are primarily very small, with one to 10 employees, and many are struggling,” said Andi Hake, who relocated to Lincoln in 2006 to head the Lincoln & Logan Chamber of Commerce.

To give Lincoln an edge, the City looked to its downtown, and in 2012 received a \$675,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for a redevelopment plan. Completed in 2013, the plan centers on preserving and strengthening the downtown’s historic character and improving streetscapes to encourage pedestrian activity. Last year, the City Council unanimously passed a resolution to establish a TIF district to capture revenue from new development and existing businesses

downtown to implement the plan. The City will use the funds to improve historic building facades, add green space, and significantly enhance streetscapes so that they are safer, more attractive, and more accessible for those with disabilities.

Lincoln is a stop on the rail corridor from Chicago to St. Louis that is currently in the middle of upgrades for 110-mph service. When the Illinois DOT announced the higher speed rail project in 2010, Lincoln's Mayor Keith Snyder appointed a task force to work with IDOT to help the project to meet local needs. In their initial proposal, the City expected to benefit from a new station, improved signal crossings, and two newly repaved streets with a gentle gradient for local traffic crossing at the tracks. "These streets literally set the stage for our parades, festivals, and concerts. It's no small investment," said Hogland. However as of the date of publication, IDOT withdrew its commitment for some of the upgrades due to a lack of necessary revenue. "It appears that some of our anticipated benefit will be delayed indefinitely pending adequate funding," said Darren Forgy, an engineering consultant on the redevelopment project.

As for the train itself, "People are excited" said Mayor Snyder. While Lincoln's ridership numbers are more modest than the big stops, the train is still viewed as a major asset to the community. As in many university towns, students at Lincoln College rely on the train to go home just as the college itself relies on the train as a feature to recruit students. Visitors to Chicago and local small business owners traveling for work also use the station, and it is not uncommon to see a recent discharge from the Logan Correctional Facility accompanied by a guard. "We don't mind at all," said Mayor Snyder. "We know if they're on their way home they'll certainly be on their best behavior."

For locals the improvement to the frequency and reliability that come along with the track upgrades will

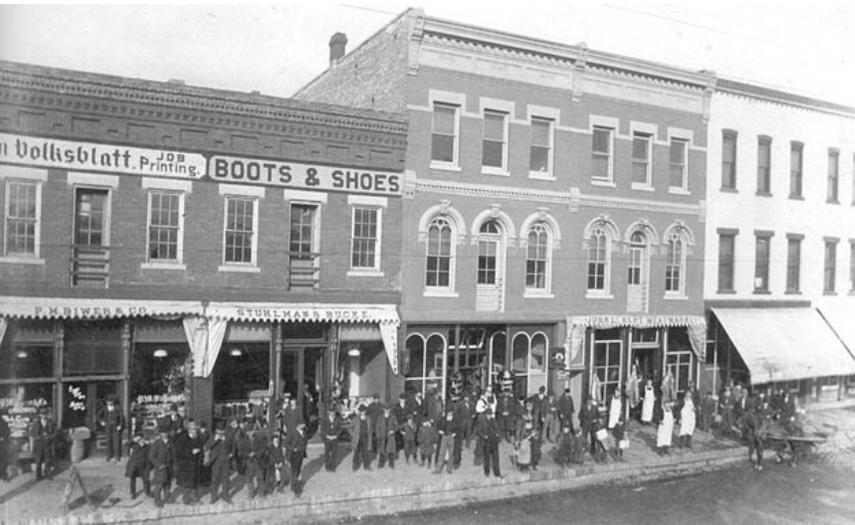
make it even more of an asset. "The higher-speed rail has great potential," said David Lanterman, owner of the local Lincoln Theater. "I have run across retired people who moved to Lincoln because they wanted a quiet, rural life but can still ride up to Chicago." Like the town, Lanterman believes that offering quality of life amenities is a key economic development strategy for Lincoln, and that the train, like the downtown, is a key amenity. "Factories and jobs have moved, and towns keep saying 'Let's get a factory,' but every small town is saying that and they're competing against each other and meanwhile things are getting worse. So you have to decide what can be do-able." Lincoln has great growth potential as a bedroom community, he said.

"It used to be all about the downtown, then it was all about the automobile, and now we've come full circle in what people are looking for. In our little out-of-the-way town, we're actually in a good position to take advantage of this because we never really changed enough in the first place."

— Darren Forgy, engineering consultant
for the City of Lincoln

"The train, the downtown, our trails make this a more connected place and help make people want to be here," he said.

The city also expects more visitors by automobile. Downtown Lincoln was historically located along the Route 66 corridor, but for a long time the historic tourist attraction had been re-routed to circumvent the downtown. In 2012, Logan County committed funding to re-sign the corridor through the downtown. Local businesses anticipate more visitors as a result of both the re-installation of the historic signage and the increased frequency of rail service. "We'll see more



Sangamon Street in the early 20th century and early 21st century

sales tax revenue, more tourism, and a decrease in commercial vacancy,” said Hogland. “I’m excited that in five or six years I can look back and say, ‘Wow, what a journey.’” The town has already seen an uptick in developer interest since it passed the TIF district.

While the Route 66 corridor offers a unique opportunity to attract tourists traveling by car, the city also hopes to provide additional connections and be more than just a place to drive through. In addition to the bike paths and pedestrian amenities in the redevelopment plan, some locals are spearheading an effort to convert an old rail right-of-way into a

bike path. “Biking and walking connections are important to give the younger generation who wants to be active activities to do and a reason to stay,” said Lanterman.

“People are looking for the opportunity to use public transit and walk more,” said Forgy. “It used to be all about the downtown, then it was all about the automobile, and now we’ve come full circle in what people are looking for. In our little out-of-the-way town, we’re actually in a good position to take advantage of this because we never really changed enough in the first place.” They hope their redevelopment efforts will create an environment both where people will want to stay and there will be more attractions to stay for. “It will be a tremendous opportunity to market and promote what we have here,” said Hogland.

Lessons from Lincoln

Historic preservation can be a powerful asset. Lincoln looks to build upon its historic downtown to create a place where more residents and businesses will want to stay. Preserving historic buildings and streetscapes supports a stronger community character that can help keep a small town on the map.

Planning requires resources, often from outside. Lincoln worked to obtain a grant just to determine what needed to be done in its downtown. The extent that municipalities and economic development agencies are willing to invest in envisioning their future shapes whether they have projects at the ready when funding does become available. However, communities of this size frequently need state or federal resources to get the economic development ball rolling.

Communities need a reliable state partner. When higher speed rail came to town, Lincoln's Mayor took early action in appointing a task force to work with the Illinois DOT on how to make the project work for the community. But a lack of funds at the state level prevented IDOT from fully funding its previous commitment. In 2002, Lincoln voters passed a sales tax to fund infrastructure that they have consistently re-instated, and in 2013, Lincoln's City Council enacted a utility tax to fund new and existing infrastructure, but the community still struggles to maintain its infrastructure. Communities require a reliable state partner to accommodate local needs and provide reliable funding for necessary repairs and upgrades.

Transportation options support communities of all sizes. While Lincoln has lower ridership numbers than larger cities, its train station is an equally useful asset. The town values walkable and well-maintained infrastructure as a key calling card to attract business and foster civic pride. While larger communities often garner the lion's share of attention when it comes to added transportation facilities, in a small community, a little project can have a big impact.



The City of Joliet is in many ways a divided community that does not yet have a unified vision for its shared future. But a new multimodal station offers a little something for everyone.

Overcoming Adversity: A New Station is a First Step for Joliet

In its early days, Joliet prospered as a transportation corridor for both river and railroad traffic, and in the middle of the 20th century, its strategic location lured several industrial companies who benefited from both the ease of shipping and its proximity to markets in neighboring Chicago, 45 miles away. While deindustrialization brought the loss of many of these jobs, the region remains a key freight corridor and experienced substantial growth as it evolved into an exurb of Chicago, topping national figures for

suburban growth and annexation in the 1990's. The loss of working class jobs coupled with a history of racial division led the impact of deindustrialization to hit some groups harder than others. As the region expanded and jobs left the city center, Joliet's low-wage workers – many of them African-American – found themselves left behind.

Joliet is the first stop on the Amtrak line from Chicago to St. Louis that is receiving higher-speed rail upgrades to achieve 110 MPH service, and reactions varied after IDOT announced the service in 2010. "It's about time we start catching up with the rest of the world," said Russ Slinkard, president and CEO of the Joliet Chamber of Commerce. "It's faster, you save time and save money, and it's good for business," he said.

The City of Joliet was likewise enthusiastic about the potential to create stronger connections between its downtown and other communities.

Others were more skeptical. Joliet is the seat of Will County, which makes heavy use of the rail and surface transportation network both for freight and to support its expanding residential communities. With many competing investment priorities, including a controversial new highway and a proposal for a third Chicagoland airport among current projects in the pipeline, they're strained for infrastructure funds. "We support the project and see how higher speed rail will benefit Illinois," said Alicia Hanlon, transportation planner for Will County. Rail cars procured for the project, for example, would be manufactured in nearby Rochelle, Illinois. However, she noted that funding constraints make implementation an uncertain prospect.

"We need better service on our commuter line," said John Grueling, executive director of the Will County Center for Economic Development. The Center and many other suburban leaders support a proposed 55-mile train route across the region dubbed the STAR (Suburban Transit Access Route) line. But, "It's a pipe dream when we can't even get basic services covered," he said. The Regional Transit Authority, which oversees and plans public transportation in Northeastern Illinois, does not currently have enough funds to keep its infrastructure in good repair, let alone add a new train line.² Each year more than 800,000 commuters board one of the 13 daily Metra commuter trains in downtown Joliet, most of them traveling to Chicago. Ridership has grown each year and peaks with gas prices.

² In its 2013 Capital Assets Condition Report, the Regional Transit Authority estimates that it would need \$31.1 billion between 2013 and 2023 to address its maintenance backlog and bring infrastructure into a state of good repair. It currently anticipates approximately \$7 billion in federal, state, and local funds.

"There would be times where people would drive downtown to get on the train and there weren't any parking spaces left," said James Haller, director of housing and economic development for Joliet. The commuter rail service is an essential draw for people to choose to locate in Joliet, he said.

While the train station remains a draw for these commuters, most riders just drive in and back out again. Outside of its administrative functions in city and county government, the downtown all but hollowed out as Joliet expanded westward. This disinvestment was further exacerbated by a wave of crime in the 1970's and '80s that branded the downtown as unsafe, a stigma that has persisted even as its crime rate has dropped.

The City has played an active role in the redevelopment of the downtown, and has made significant strides in the last decade – including attracting two new casinos and an ongoing expansion of Joliet Junior College – but it remains sleepy. Many of downtown Joliet's residents question the extent to which this progress benefits all of the area's residents. "The urban perspective has not always been taken into consideration in redevelopment efforts," said Mac Willis, executive director of the Unity Development Corporation, which serves Joliet's in-town residents who are fighting the same education, crime, and employment challenges as many other pockets of poverty in disinvested urban rust belt cores.

"We want a vibrant downtown that we can be proud of, but most of all, we need jobs," he said.

The region's growth in the logistics industry has actually created many new, blue-collar opportunities in new intermodal terminals, large warehouses and linked industrial parks. But these jobs are by nature built in remote locations, and out of reach for those without reliable personal transportation. This issue

disproportionately impacts low-wage workers who live in Joliet's traditional core.

"It's a big problem right now," said Pastor Herbert Brooks, Jr., speaker of the Will County Board. "You have to drive to these jobs, so to the people who can't afford a car, the very people who need those jobs the most, they're off limits," he said.

While transportation is only one component of Joliet's socioeconomic challenges, an investment came along that gives access to opportunity a boost. After the city missed getting a federal TIGER grant for a new multimodal facility, in 2010 the State of Illinois gave Joliet funding to build the Joliet Regional Multimodal Transportation Center (JRMMTC). The center will be LEED Silver certified, include a 500-space parking garage, and connect to improved pedestrian and bicycle access in the surrounding neighborhood.

Aerial view of downtown Joliet and region



In addition to housing passenger and commuter rail, the station will link local buses, intercity passenger buses, Chicago airport shuttles, and taxis in one easily accessible downtown location. The \$42 million project, now under construction, was funded by \$32 million

from the State of Illinois, \$7.5 million from the City, and \$2.2 million from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad.

While Joliet's urban residents, suburban commuters, and city and county governments each hold a different stake in the downtown, the center offers some benefit for everyone. Joliet's Mayor Tom Thanas told Illinois Governor Pat Quinn's office that a project of this magnitude is something that every mayor dreams of, bringing hundreds of jobs to jump-start the ongoing economic development efforts downtown. In addition to creating jobs the project provided needed safety upgrades on the line, and the new transit connections can help make accessing job opportunities easier.

"Another benefit of the project is that it will help free up space for freight rail," said Grueling. Track upgrades completed as part of the project support the work of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE), a large public-private partnership to address congestion across freight, commuter, and passenger rail for the Chicagoland rail network. The additional parking and multimodal capacity also ensure that Joliet can continue to attract new commuters, said Haller.

Officials also expect the project to further catalyze redevelopment in the downtown and pave the way for the construction of new housing adjacent to transit.

While most commuters now drive, the city anticipates a change. "We've seen more people biking and walking, and having that infrastructure in place we expect to see more of it," said Haller. The city has focused on putting supportive infrastructure in place, and got a boost from a \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that was used to upgrade streetlights and install bike racks.

For locals, it's important to offer these options. "In other countries you can get around any way you like," said Slinkard. "We have to stay globally competitive."

"We have a ways to go," said Haller, who envisions a vibrant, walkable downtown with heavy foot traffic, street cafes, and bike parking on every corner. "But we're already better off than a lot of places, because we have this historic downtown, and it's full of opportunity. This multimodal center is going to punch our ticket for the next hundred years," he added.

"The region's growth in the logistics industry has actually created many new, blue-collar opportunities in new intermodal terminals, large warehouses and linked industrial parks... but "You you have to drive to these jobs, so to the people who can't afford a car, the very people who need those jobs the most, they're off limits."

— Herbert Brooks, Jr., speaker of the Will County Board



Downtown Joliet

Lessons from Joliet

Investing in multimodal transportation creates jobs along with other benefits. While construction jobs are cited as a benefit of any infrastructure project, that benefit alone is not a sufficient cause for investment. The Joliet Multimodal Center creates jobs, but also helps to ease freight rail congestion, improves commuter safety by creating safe rail crossings, and brings together multiple connections and modes for getting around the region. It also supports the city's ongoing effort to redevelop the downtown.

Multimodal centers can be economic centers. Unlike smaller communities downstate, in Joliet, "downtown" usually means Chicago. As a suburb of Chicago, the City in some ways lacks a cohesive center because its orientation is to somewhere else. By serving as a linking destination both to the city, across the state, and around the region, Joliet's multimodal facility provides an opportunity to give the region a new center and allow locals to begin to rethink the downtown.

Transportation options support access to opportunity. For many employed residents of Joliet, the Metra commuter rail provides an essential service. And for many unemployed residents, the problem is not necessarily a lack of jobs, but a lack of affordable transportation to jobs. Spread out land use can make it harder to link transit and connect jobs with residents who cannot afford a car. Strong transit connections can attract residents, and where it is practical, efforts to locate employment centers closer to town centers and along existing transit routes can support greater social equity.

Closing Thoughts: Putting Illinois, and the Country, Back on Track

Illinois' rail towns increasingly are finding that the prospect of new investment in rail, coupled with changing market demand and demographics, are opening a new window for revitalization. Economic development strategies like those described in this document serve to preserve environmental resources, expand access to opportunity, and grow local economies in the short term, while putting communities on more resilient footing for the long term. The examples in this report are just the tip of the iceberg.

A train yard looking East towards the Chicago skyline

Macomb, Illinois aims to redevelop its downtown square to entice transit-oriented development after a newly constructed transportation hub has seen high ridership increases. Mayor Mike Inman has spearheaded an effort to get Amtrak riders to explore restaurants and tourist attractions at the station areas along its line alongside mayors from Galesburg, Monmouth, and Quincy.

Peoria, Illinois has requested federal funding to begin a feasibility study to establish passenger service connecting the Quad Cities, Galesburg, Peoria, Normal, Decatur, Champaign and Danville. In 2013 its City Council turned its attention to making it easier and safer for residents to get around without a car.



Kewanee, Illinois aims to strengthen streetscape connections between its downtown and a new passenger rail station funded with support from the Illinois Jobs Now program. The City has recently seen an uptick in developers interested in building housing in the downtown, and streetscape upgrades would provide an opportunity to support walkable development.

Rockford, Illinois eventually aims to implement TOD adjacent to a forthcoming passenger rail station, and is redeveloping a portion of its downtown with a complete streets approach. Mayor Larry Morrissey is a vocal proponent of downtown redevelopment and high speed rail, and the region has plans in place to add commuter rail service to Chicago should funding become available.

Carlinville, Illinois hopes to redevelop its historic square adjacent to its train station to attract additional pedestrian and business activity.

Carbondale, Illinois has experienced recent growth in its downtown and has begun to raise funds for an ambitious downtown redevelopment plan that will include a new multimodal facility.

Springfield, Illinois received a 2013 TIGER grant to consolidate a network of rail tracks that bisect its downtown, a first step toward constructing a new multimodal center to spur downtown development.

Freeport, Illinois has planned a multimodal facility to unite rail, auto, transit, and bicycle infrastructure and catalyze redevelopment of its riverfront area. The state has programmed construction between 2014 and 2019 if funds are available.

Many communities are taking risks and making investments to adapt to 21st century needs. By banding together, raising new revenue, and developing strong partnerships, they are laying out creative visions

to redevelop.

But they can't do it alone. The Illinois Jobs Now! Capital program has funded \$18 billion for transportation projects since 2009, but the program is winding down and the state faces a series of budget dilemmas, including the nation's largest unfunded pension crisis. Illinois' 2014-19 transportation program relies primarily on federal funds, but now the federal program itself is in doubt as gas tax receipts fall off and the transportation trust fund faces insolvency absent congressional action.

Closing Lessons

As the communities in this report illustrate, relatively modest investments can help local communities rebuild their economies on a sound footing that ultimately is the foundation for the economy of the state and the nation. To ensure that their success can be sustained, and replicated in many more communities, the state and federal governments should consider taking several steps in the near term:

- The voices of local leaders have the greatest impact in overcoming congressional inertia to ensure these critical economic investments. Therefore, these local leaders, and those aspiring to emulate them, should come together to express support at the federal level for more local control over transportation funds, the TIGER program, passenger rail, Transportation Alternatives and similar programs that help small cities like these bootstrap their way to economic renewal.
- The state should continue and expand rail investment, and consider its own multimodal program similar to TIGER, for which communities of all sizes would be eligible to apply, as well as a program of planning grants for station areas and town centers.
- State economic development officials – working through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity – should build on the findings in this report and work toward systematically applying the lessons learned. Ideally, the lessons and best practices would continue to be built on through a network of local economic development officials such as the Illinois Development Council, and implemented through inter-departmental cooperation among DCEO, IDOT and other pertinent entities.

These communities need strong federal and state partners to get the job done, and – as the communities profiled here demonstrate – with enough creativity and grit, they can move forward to achieve their visions for more sustainable renewal that ultimately benefit the nation as a whole.

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Early 20th-Century View of Sangamon Street Showing the Eckert Meat Market courtesy of Finding Lincoln Illinois, originally appears in Gleason, Lincoln: A Pictorial History, p. 71

Contemporary View of the Pluth, Eckert, and Western Hotel Buildings on Sangamon Street courtesy of Leigh Henson, Finding Lincoln Illinois

Historic Joliet by the Joliet Area Historical Museum for Enjoy Illinois

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